



OPINION

Proposed Levy Cuts are Worrisome

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For the past 14 years, the Families and Education Levy has provided services for students and their families in Seattle. Since before the levy began, a vexing and persistent gap in academic achievement has existed in our schools and across the nation.

Mayor Greg Nickels' \$103 million proposal for the renewal of Seattle's Family and Education Levy sets a new direction for the city's school children and their families and promises to bring stricter accountability and measurable results in student learning.

This will be achieved by appropriately focusing our strategic levy investment on desired outcomes, including: increased student attendance; higher grades and test scores; reduced suspensions and expulsions; and higher graduation rates.

Programs funded by the Families and Education Levy that fail to show results will be cut, the mayor says. However, of widespread concern among parents and educators is the mayor's proposal to now cut most school-based programs previously supported by the levy that have shown dramatic results for our more vulnerable student population.

These include:

- School nurses. Four of the 11 levy-funded school nurses would be eliminated and middle and high school nurses would be reduced to half time.
- Family support workers. A key focus of former Mayor Norm Rice's original levy, family support workers would lose five positions. These workers provide in-school counseling services in the elementary schools and make home visits to encourage families be more involved in their children's homework and academic success. They also help immigrant and low-income families find needed clothing, medical care, tutoring and translation services.
- Middle school support. A centerpiece of the last levy, the Middle School Support Program would be completely eliminated. This program has provided grants to 18 middle and K-8 schools to fund a variety of counseling programs tailored to each school's needs, such as anti-bullying and social skills counseling, behavior management, truancy reduction and home-school coordination.
- Out of school time. The mayor proposes to eliminate school-sponsored programs for after-school time and contract directly with private organizations for services. This would move these after-school activities and services to locations away from the schools. These programs have allowed teachers and counselors to build important mentoring relationships with their students outside of class.

In all, the mayor's proposed levy package cuts school-sponsored programs and activities by nearly \$3 million per year. This is no way to build a partnership for academic success. The Families and Education Levy has provided an opportunity for the city of Seattle and Seattle Public Schools to form a unique partnership, with the goal of increasing academic achievement for our students.

The levy arose out of an education summit in 1990 that brought together city leaders and educators committed to improving educational outcomes. With limited resources we should

maintain a focus in the levy on proven programs that support this strong partnership. We must work with schools and school leadership to ensure that health care, family support, middle school and after-school programs align with students' needs and their academic curriculum.

Schools alone cannot turn around failing students. We must all be held accountable for the unacceptable and glaring gap in student achievement and the lost opportunities for later success a lack of education brings.

We must strengthen the school partnership with the city and community in order to see real results in raising every child's chances for academic success.

Our kids deserve no less.